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ABSTRACT

Primarily concerned with the past development of the politics of education, this paper also looks at likely future directions and progress. First, it seeks to review briefly the growing body of research carried out from 1973 until 1980. Second, it evaluates the progress made since the beginning of 1973 in the development of the politics of education as an area of research specialization and comments on some of the problems the field faces today. Third, the paper offers suggestions concerning future research needs and priorities. (Author/JM)

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Reassessing Research in the Politics of Education

Paper presented at a panel organised by the Politics of Education Association on 'Politics of Education Research: Current and Future Impacts upon Scholarship, Policies and Practices'.

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The past decade has been, without doubt, a most important period in the development of research on the political aspects and functions of education. Significant advances have been made on many different fronts and the politics of education is now clearly a much better recognised, more confident and more sophisticated field of research concentration than it was in the early 1970's. At the same time, considerable problems still remain and these constitute an important challenge for researchers. Whether or not the politics of education achieves many of the objectives hoped for will depend largely on how seriously scholars address themselves to these problems, and how effectively they cope with them. In addition, the choices made today and in the near future with regard to research agendas and strategies are likely to have a substantial influence on achievements over the next decade within the field.

This paper[1] is concerned with the development of the politics of education to date, and with its likely future directions and progress. More specifically it has three aims. First, it seeks to review research carried out over the period from 1973 to the present time. Because of limitations on space, this review is relatively brief. Second, it attempts to make some evaluation of the progress made over the period since the beginning of 1973 in the development of the politics of education as an area of research specialisation, and to comment on some of the problems that the politics of education faces today. Third, the paper offers some suggestions concerning future research needs and priorities. While every effort is made to take an international perspective as far as research in English is concerned, inevitably the comments and judgments reflect mainly the author's Australian experience.

The paper is based on the assumption that lively progress in any research field is dependent, among other things, on its members regularly attempting to

(a) review completed research within the particular field, and the lines and types of research that have been followed;

(b) tackle recognised methodological, theoretical and practical problems facing the field and its scholars; and

(c) discuss seriously priorities for future research.

Of course, this does not mean that the most pressing and difficult problems will be readily or easily solved. Neither does it mean that some overall consensus about priorities for research will or should emerge. In fact, on this last point, it could be distinctly dangerous if a single research strategy

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1. It should be noted that the paper draws heavily on chapter 2 of my bibliographic monograph, Research in the Politics of Education 1973 to 1978, Education Research Unit, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra, 1979.

came to be accepted by all, or even most, scholars in the field. Still, without discussion of priorities there is a tendency for individual researchers to follow their own interests (and often to continue existing lines of work) without any real appreciation of gaps that may remain, or of opportunities for new lines of work. I suspect that coincidence and chance play a much larger role in the selection of research topics, both by graduate students and established researchers, than we often imagine.

REVIEW OF RESEARCH SINCE 1973

Perhaps the most obvious trend over the period since 1973 has been a marked increase in the volume and variety of research produced. It is by no means easy to measure this in a precise manner, but my estimate is that at least twice as much scholarly work in the politics of education was produced between 1973 and 1979 compared to the amount produced in the preceding seven-year period. Some of the new work came from scholars who had been actively involved with research in the politics of education for many years - from people such as L. Harmon Zeigler, Michael Kirst, Frederick M. Wirt, Roald F. Campbell and Stephen K. Bailey[2] to choose some examples from the United States. But the bulk of the work came from graduate students, from relatively young scholars holding their first university or research appointments, and from established scholars drawn from in other areas of education and political science. The contribution of graduate students deserves special comment. Over the period under review a surprising number of higher degree dissertations and theses were completed; my bibliography published in 1979 lists over 100 dissertations for the period 1973 to 1978 relating to the United States, thirty to forty theses relating to Canada, and over thirty theses relating to Australia[3]. In many cases graduate students opened up new areas of work, carried out detailed studies to test hypotheses or widely accepted beliefs, or developed and/or applied new methodological approaches and techniques. They also contributed significantly to the building up of literature in the field, and today they constitute a large group of well-trained researchers who hopefully will provide important leadership over the next decade and beyond.

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2. Bailey was one of the few established political scientists who became involved in research in the politics of education during the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the period now under review, he published a number of papers and a book entitled Education Interest Groups in the Nation's Capital (American Council on Education, Washington, 1975).

3. This refers to work specifically in the politics of education, and excludes work primarily in related areas such as the economics of education.

The increase in variety of work took a number of forms. Completely new topics were explored such as the politics of school curriculum[4], the politics of evaluation[5], and the politics of budgeting in higher education.[6] New approaches were developed, including those employed by the radical political economics[7]. And in many countries, particularly outside the United States, scholars explored many major areas of the politics of education in their societies for the first time. For example, in Australia Smart[8] made the first detailed study of the origins and implementation problems of particular government programmes for education, while Reynolds made the first detailed exploration of the role of the Australian Education Council in the formation of Federal education policy[9].

At the same time, it must be admitted that in some senses the period under review was less exciting than earlier periods, when the politics of education was just emerging as a recognised field. Progress was also less spectacular and dramatic. This, no doubt, is the experience of most fields of research. In the early stages the efforts of a small number of researchers, often over a brief period, lead to spectacular changes, but then follows a longer and less dramatic phase of steady growth and consolidation.

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4. For example, Tony Becher and Stuart Maclure, The Politics of Curriculum Change, Hutchinson, London, 1978; and Denis Lawton, The Politics of the School Curriculum, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1980.

5. For example, see Ernest R. House (ed.), School Evaluation: The Politics and Process, McCutchan, Berkeley, 1973 and Gerald R. Sroufe, 'Evaluation and Politics' in Jay D. Scribner (ed.), The Politics of Education: The Seventy-sixth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1977.

6. For example, the work of Lyman A. Glenny and colleagues carried out at the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education at the University of California, Berkeley.

7. The best known work from this approach is Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life, Basic Books, New York, 1976.

8. D. Smart, 'Federal Aid to Australian Schools: Origins of Aspects of the Implementation of the Commonwealth Science Laboratories and Libraries Schemes', Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1975.

9. M. J. Reynolds, 'Intergovernmental Relations in Australian Education: The Role of the Australian Education Council in the Formation of Federal Policy', M.Ed. thesis, University of Western Australia, 1974.

Apart from the marked increase in volume and variety of work, the period under review saw some very important contributions made in a number of different countries and in various areas of specialisation. For example, in the United States published volumes included such works as Dale Mann's[10] Policy Decision-Making in Education: Introduction to Calculation and Control and The Politics of Administrative Representation, Zeigler and Jennings'[11] Governing American Schools and Ladd and Lipset's[12] study of the political orientations of university and college academics. On Britain the literature included Moodie and Eustace's[13] study of university government and Kogan's[14] Education Policy Making: A Study of Interest Groups and Parliament as well as important contributions by visiting American scholars such as Robert E. Jennings.[15] In Australia there were substantial works such as Birch's[16] volumes on legal and constitutional issues, Smart's[17] book on Federal Aid to Australian Schools and Williams'[18] useful overview of the tertiary education system. Volumes relating to other countries included Burton Clark's[19] study of academic power in Italy and Barkan's[20] book on university students, development and politics in various

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10. Dale Mann, Policy Decision-Making in Education: Introduction to Calculation and Control, Teachers College Press, New York, 1975; and The Politics of Administrative Representation, Heath, Lexington, 1976.

11. Harmon L. Zeigler and M. Kent Jennings, Governing American Schools: Political Interaction in Local School Districts, Duxbury, North Scituate, 1974.

12. Everett Carll Ladd, Jr. and Seymour Martin Lipset, The Divided Academy: Professors and Politics, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1975.

13. Graeme Moodie and Rowland Eustace, Power and Authority in British Universities, Allen and Unwin, Oxford, 1974.

14. Maurice Kogan, Education Policy-Making: A Study of Interest Groups and Parliament, Allen and Unwin, London, 1975.

15. Robert E. Jennings, Education and Politics: policy-making in local education authorities, Batsford, London, 1977.

16. I. K. F. Birch, Constitutional Responsibility for Education in Australia, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1975, and The School and the Law, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1976.

17. Don Smart, Federal Aid to Australian Schools, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1979.

18. Bruce Williams, Systems of Higher Education: Australia, IECD, New York, 1978.

19. Burton R. Clark, Academic Power in Italy: Bureaucracy and Oligarchy in a National System of Higher Education, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1977.

20. Joel D. Barkan, An African Dilemma: University of Students, Development and Politics in Ghana, Tanzania, and Uganda, Oxford University Press, London, 1975.

African nations. The progress made over the period in a number of countries was substantial. This was particularly true of Australia, Canada and the U.K. On the other hand, the lead in research established by the United States prior to 1973 was not seriously challenged. In my 1979 bibliography almost 40 per cent of the research listed relates to the politics of American education or was produced by American scholars, while the coverage for the United States is much more selective than that for any other nation.

Third, research activity over the period saw some marked changes in emphasis and balance. Some areas and topics became much more important, while interest in others declined. For instance, particularly among American scholars, interest in work on political socialisation and the politics of developing nations waned appreciably, while there was a corresponding growth in fields relating to policy processes and to policy analysis. Or again, in a number of countries interest in the politics of higher education increased, particularly in relation to system-level issues. This in part probably reflected the development of new higher education co-ordinating machinery in many different western nations, and the emergence of new problems centred on the independence of higher education institutions and pressures for greater government controls and accountability in a period of stationery or declining enrolments and contracting public financial support.

A fourth trend was an increase in the number of large-scale, highly-sophisticated projects. One example is the Education Governance Project conducted at Ohio State University between January 1972 and August 1974 by Campbell and Mazzoni. With substantial funding from the U.S. Office of Education, this project sought to develop and appraise alternative models of state education governance. Data on particular aspects were gathered from all of the fifty American states, and twelve intense state case-studies were made. The results were reported in a number of detailed research monographs and in a summary volume.[21] Another example is a project carried out by Zeigler and Jennings[22] at the University of Oregon. In exploring issues in local school governance, they conducted personal interviews with national samples of school

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21. The summary volume is Roald F. Campbell and Tim L. Mazzoni, Jr., State Policy Making for the Public Schools, McCutchan, Berkeley, 1976.

22. Zeigler and Jennings, Governing American Schools.

board members and superintendents. In all, some 490 board members and 82 superintendents in 83 different school districts were interviewed. These interviews were supplemented with further interviews with board members and superintendents in 13 large city districts (in order to allow the researchers to speak with greater centainty about large city school districts) and with interviews of a sample of members of the public in selected school districts to test mass-elite congruence. Still another example is Peterson's[23] book on school politics in the city of Chicago, which drew on the author's own research carried out with various grants over a period of eight or nine years, and also on the work of a number of his former graduate students at the University of Chicago. In the other hand, however, it must be admitted that many studies employed rather narrow and limiting research designs. Perhaps the most serious weakness was a too heavy dependence on case-explorations and on surveys using very limited samples. Another was the lack of longitudinal studies and projects which studied the impact of particular policies, or policy changes through before and after data collection.

Fifth, the period saw some important advances in theory building and in the use of theory in empirical work. In particular the work of Mann,[24] Zeigler and Jennings,[25] Peterson,[26] Cohen and March[27] and Wirt[28] stand out. Zeigler and Jennings and Mann drew on traditional political theory and used concepts from political science, such as participation, control, responsiveness and representation as guiding concepts for their empirical work. Peterson's work on Chicago school politics skilfully employed bargaining and unitary models to explore policy-making. In doing so, not only did he provide important insights into the operation of school boards in large U.S. cities, but he also made a significant theoretical contribution to policy-making literature in general. Or, to take a final example, Wirt suggested an alternative framework

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23. Paul E. Peterson, School Politics Chicago Style, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1976.

24. Mann, Policy Making in Education and The Politics of Administrative Representation.

25. Zeigler and Jennings, Governing American Schools.

26. Peterson, School Politics Chicago Style.

27. Michael D. Cohen and James G. March, Leadership and Ambiguity: The American College President, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1974.

28. Frederick M. Wirt, 'Reassessment Needs in the Study of the Politics of Education', Teachers College Record, Vol. 78, No. 4, 1977.

for the analysis of the politics of education, based on the disequilibrium between needs, expectations and wants on the one hand, and on the other the resources of money and knowledge, as well as the capacity of policy systems. But despite the work and contributions of these and other scholars, much of the research of the period made little real contribution to theory, and often failed to draw effectively on the wealth of concepts and frameworks available in political science and related fields. Few substantial studies of the period, for example, showed any awareness at all of the existence of Allison's[29] important book in which he used different theoretical models to explore American decision-making on the Cuban missile crisis, despite the fact that it was published as early as 1971. Even now many scholars seem unaware of the wealth of literature on interest group theory or organisation theory to take two other examples.

Finally, despite the various advances made, the research of the period showed a surprising neglect of particular kinds of work which many scholars quite rightly regard as important. In particular there was little writing and debate concerning what the focus and scope of the politics of education as a research field should be, comparatively few detailed comparative studies, a neglect of work in many countries on the role of central government (as opposed to state or local government) in education governance, and a lack of emphasis on detailed studies of policy implementation and the impact of policies. Further, there were relatively few studies summarising, interpreting and synthesising research findings on particular topics, and attempting to convey conclusions and explain implications to the wider educational community. Admittedly, there were some exceptions. For instance, the bibliographical essays of Peterson[30] and also of Iannaccone and Cistone,[31] as well as edited volumes by Scribner[32] and by Mosher and Waggoner,[33] clearly provided useful discussion of broad issues about focus, scope and research agenda. Similarly,

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29. Graham Allison, Essence of Decision, Little Brown, Boston, 1971.

30. Paul E. Peterson, 'The Politics of American Education' in Fred N. Kerlinger and John B. Carroll (eds.), Review of Research in Education 2, Peacock, Itasca, 1974.

31. Laurence Iannaccone and Peter J. Cistone, The Politics of Education, Clearinghouse on Education Management, University of Oregon, Eugene, 1974.

32. Scribner, The Politics of Education.

33. Edith K. Mosher and Jennings L. Waggoner, Jr. (eds.), The Changing Politics of Education: Prospects for the 1980's, McCutchan, Berkeley, 1978.

a volume edited by Cistone[34] in Wirt's Heath politics of education series very skilfully brought together some of the key findings of a decade or more of research on U.S. and Canadian school boards. But these, unfortunately, were in the main exceptions.

CURRENT STATUS AND PROBLEMS

What is the current status and standing of the politics of education? How far has it progressed towards becoming a well-developed and widely-recognised field? What problems lie ahead?

Different scholars in the field give different answers, largely dependent on whether they are concentrating their attention more on the achievements won, or on the problems which remain to be solved. In a paper published in the Teachers' College Record in 1977 Wirt, for example, discussed various problems in methodology and research design, but concluded on a note, drawing attention to the significant achievements:

> But this doesn't mean what we know is useless. As I think of our knowledge now and a decade ago, when the works of Bailey and Masters et al. stood as lonely beacons on a shore barren of political substance, I cannot but find pleasure in what we now have. There is excitement in seeing political scientists apply their concepts to the material of school policy, often with a sense of surprise that they fit. Nor do I feel any need to abandon our studies because perfection does not exist.[35]

On the other hand, Peterson in 1978 in a review of the 1977 NSSE volume on the politics of education took a more dismal view, asserting that the politics of education is still in its infancy. He also complained at its lack of focus and distinctive methodological orientations and conceptual categories:

> The politics of education is a new field, but so far it has very little discipline to it. As practiced by those wearing the label, it reaches across the very breadth of political science and education. What's more, no methodological approach is peculiar to or excluded from this field. Significantly, neither political science nor education, as fields, are disciplines with

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34. Peter J. Cistone (ed.), Understanding School Boards: Problems and Prospects, Heath, Lexington, 1975. Other exceptions still are in the area of comparative studies e.g. John H. Van de Graaff et al. Academic Power: Patterns of Authority in Seven National Systems of Higher Education, Praeger, New York, 1978; and Lyman A. Glenny (ed.), Funding Higher Education: A Six Nation Analysis, Praeger, New York, 1979.

35. Wirt, 'Reassessment Needs in the Study of the Politics of Education'.

> distinctive conceptual categories and/or methodological orientations. In contrast to other of the social sciences, their unity lies in the social sector serviced by the research and teaching - schools and government - not in constructs or approaches internal to the field. The offspring of such polyglot parents is not likely to have very predictable shape.[36]

In this assessment we will concentrate first on the achievement, and then on problems and weaknesses.

The achievements won over the past two decades are by nor means insignificant. As already indicated, there is now a substantial body of literature dealing with the various political aspects and functions of schools and other educational agencies in the United States, in many other western nations, and in developing societies. There is a growing band of scholars who see their major research area as being the politics of education, or who see the politics of education as one of a number of related fields of research concentration with which they identify. Graduate courses in the politics of education are now being offered within many educational administration programmes, while teacher education programmes often draw on politics of education literature and include units relating to such themes as policy making on education, the role of pressure groups, and power and authority in education. Mechanisms to bring scholars in the field together are becoming better developed. For example, in the United States the work of the Politics of Education Association deserves mention. Links are also developing to bring scholars from different countries into more effective contact. The Politics of Education Association, for instance, in 1977 devoted a special number of its Bulletin[37] to articles on the politics and government of Canadian education, while the UCEA has sponsored a bibliographical directory[38] of researchers. This directory together with a supplement listed 135 researchers from ten different countries. Moreover, the politics of education clearly is becoming better recognised, particularly within education. Evidence of this is the fact that in 1977 both

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36. Review by Paul E. Peterson in American Educational Research Journal, Vol. 15, No. 2, Spring 1978.

37. Politics of Education Bulletin, Vol. 7, No. 2, Winter 1977.

38. Donald H. Layton and Robert J. Neiderberger (eds.), The Politics of Education Bibliographical Directory, UCEA, Columbus, 1977. A supplement was published in 1978.

the American National Society for the Study of Education and the Canadian Society for the Study of Education devoted full yearbooks to the politics of education[39], while first volume of the Australian Association for Research in Education's Australian Review of Educational Research will be on the topic of 'Control in Australian Education'. Further, volumes on the politics of education are now often reviewed in many scholarly education and political science journals, and leading scholarly conferences in both disciplines often run symposia or provide for paper sessions on topics within the field; at the 1978 annual conference on the Australian Association for Research in Education a full day pre-conference seminar was devoted to the theme of 'Federal Intervention in Australian Education'.

At the same time it must be acknowledged that considerable problems remain. In the first place, there are the two continuing related problems of securing full recognition both within political science and education as a proper and separate field of research concentration, and developing further a sense of identity and community among scholars involved in both research and teaching. On both matters there has been substantial progress, but much still remains to be achieved.

Securing recognition within established disciplines is not an easy task for any new field. There are always vested interests likely to be affected, and most academics are basically conservative when it comes to bestowing recognition on new fields and disciplines. There are also problems because of the traditional barriers between education and politics, and because both within education and political science there is still some hesitation about status within the scholarly community. Much the same is true with regard to developing a sense of identity and community. Apart from the traditional barriers between education and political science, there are often marked differences in style and orientation between scholars from the two disciplines. Both also often have traditional loyalties to other fields within their disciplines. But apart from this, both these problems also stem from other problems facing the politics of education which I will deal with shortly - uncertainty about focus, scope and boundaries; lack of any distinctive methodological approach

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39. Scribner, The Politics of Education; and J. H. A. Wallin (ed.), 1977 Yearbook: The Politics of Canadian Education, Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Edmonton, 1977.

and conceptual categories; and a failure to convince other scholars and practitioners of the utility of research in the politics of education.

With regard to the development of a sense of identity and community among scholars, substantial progress has been made through the work of bodies such as the Politics of Education Association in the U.S., through the conduct of various symposia, and through the establishment of new outlets for publication, such as the special series of volumes on the politics of education edited by Frederick M. Wirt for the American publisher, Heath. But clearly more could be done, especially to provide a greater variety of outlets for scholarly writing and opportunities for scholars with different interests to meet.

But perhaps the most serious problem for the politics of education is continuing uncertainly about the proper scope, focus and boundaries for the field, and concern that it can point to few or no distinctive methodologies and concepts. This problem has been mentioned by a number of leaders in the field over the years. For example, in 1974 Iannaconne and Cistone wrote in their admirable review of American literature in the field:

> The politics of education is presently without an integrative intellectual identity. Its scope is not well defined or its boundaries firmly fixed. Researchers in the field have shown differing conceptions of the essential core of their studies, whether it be the governance of education, education and the political system, or the policy process in education. Moreover, they have indicated little interest in designing analytical classification schemes or mapping systems that might lend form and direction to their collective effort. A diversity in purposes and priorities and a wide range of approaches and methods are symptomatic of the lack of a coherent conception of the field.[40]

The same year in a similar type of review Peterson pointed to the fact that 'the range of topics that is quite properly considered part of the educational politics field cuts across virtually the entire political science discipline',[41] and went on to doubt whether the politics of education in any meaningful sense constituted a separate field:

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40. Iannaccone and Cistone, The Politics of Education, p.8.

41. Peterson, 'The Politics of American Education', p.349.

> Even viewed as a field of policy analysis the politics of education is no more a specific field of study than, say, the politics of agriculture, the politics of housing, or the study of political activity in any other substantive policy area. Indeed, the relatively early development of the politics of education as a policy subfield may have no explanation other than the substantial institutional support for the study of education, as compared to other policy areas. In fact, there is no convincing theoretical reason for claiming that educational politics have such a distinctive character that their study requires special analytical, conceptual and/or methodical tools.[42]

Although related the two components of this problem can be separated. Thus we will first look at the issue of scope, focus and boundaries, and then at the issue of distinctive methodologies and concepts.

It is plainly true that the scope and focus of the politics of education are not well defined, and that its boundaries are by no means firmly fixed. As Iannaccone and Cistine pointed out, different scholars hold different views about what constitutes the core of the field, and there is as yet no broad consensus about how various topics of study are conceptually linked. But in addition, there are two further problems. First, many scholars, particularly in the United States, hold a very limited view of the field, and more or less equate the politics of education with study of the governance of elementary and secondary education. This view is adopted, at least in practice, even by some leading figures. For example, in his 1974 review of research, Peterson[43] briefly admitted at the outset that the exchanges between the educational and political systems are in both directions, and that the field includes studies of political socialisation and political development as well as the influence of political institutions and factors on education policy. But then, without offering any adequate explanation, he limited himself for the remainder of the essay to literature dealing exclusively with one side of the exchange, and with that solely in relation to elementary and secondary education. This limited view, I consider, is unfortunate. In the U.S. it has meant that little effective interaction has taken place between students of the politics of elementary and secondary education and students of the politics of higher education.[44]

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42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. One exception to this was the Virginia symposium of 1976 which included a theme on the politics of higher education, with a keynote paper by Robert O. Berdahl. See Mosher and Waggoner, The Changing Politics of Education.

Not surprisingly students of the politics of elementary and secondary education are almost completely ignorant of work relating to higher education; Peterson thus quite wrongly says that 'studies of the politics of higher education are still quite sparse'.[45] It is also unfortunate, I suggest, because this view of the politics of education is less conceptually satisfactory and less likely to stimulate greater interaction between scholars from education and political science. A further problem is that to date there has been comparatively little discussion about the scope and focus of the field and about how the boundaries should or might be drawn. This is a pity since experience suggests that academic fields develop most effectively when scholars within them can see some sort of overall unity and can set their own research within a broader context. Such insights lead to better co-ordination between researchers, and often to the borrowing of insights and approaches. Discussion about boundaries also often highlights neglected areas and suggests further links between topics.[46]

The issue of a lack of distinctive methodologies and concepts worries me less. It is a problem experienced in many fields, including other branches of political science and education. As Peterson admits, new fields and subfields develop because scholars begin to call themselves by certain labels and decide that it is useful to interact with others whose interests along certain dimensions seem similar. Further, if the distinctive methodologies and concepts we seek are to develop, they will be the product, not the beginning, of interaction between scholars with shared interests. Already some progress has been made; the work of Zeigler and Peterson provide examples of methodologies and concepts developed and extended to study educational phenomena, though in both cases their utility is by no means limited to educational topics. But undoubtedly in the future, if the politics of education is to advance significantly, a high priority will have to be given to methodological innovation.

Another major problem for the politics of education is the comparative failure to date to convince other scholars and practitioners of the utility of much of the research effort in the politics of education. This is partly a problem of communication; to date there are too few volumes which draw together the findings of numerous detailed research studies, and present

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45. Peterson, 'The Politics of American Education', p.349.

46. This point is duscussed in G. S. Harman, The Politics of Education: A Bibliographical Guide, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1974.

them in a manner that non-specialists will readily understand. But it is also partly a problem of choice of topics for research. In a most important essay in the 1977 NSSE yearbook on the politics of education, Hawley[47] called for greater attention by those who study politics, and particularly the politics of education, to issues that go beyond questions of who governs and how governors behave to the straightforward question, 'so what?'. His argument is that a failure to begin a more concerted effort to document and understand the linkages between political processes and outcomes will mean that our political theories will be less robust and more fragile than they could be, that few of our findings will be of enduring significance, and that our contributions to the development of a more just society will be severely limited. From recent research on public policy in all areas he showed that there have been quite a number of studies of policy formation and policy outputs, but very few studies of policy implementation and policy impact. He summed up his argument as follows:

> ... even among the minority of political scientists who do directly consider the policy question, only a handful deal with the impact of public policies and most of these deal with the allocation of resources and privileges rather than the outcomes such allocations have for the quality of life experienced by different groups or individuals. In short, few political scientists have linked the political process to policy outcomes ...[48]

A further problem relating to the point above is that to date there has been comparatively little discussion and debate about research priorities. Resources in terms of funds and personnel are limited, and it is important that we should try to secure the maximum benefit possible. The field is also exceedingly large, with a vast array of data; consequently it seems desirable that efforts should be made to reach some consensus about how resources could best be utilised, and about whether efforts would be better concentrated on a limited range of topics rather than being spread thinly and possibly fairly ineffectively across the whole field, and if concentrated then on what topics and how. Discussion on research priorities may also help achieve desirable balances, between theoretical and empirical work, between studies concerned with phenomena at one point of time and longitudinal

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47. Willis D. Hawley, 'If Schools are for Learning, the Study of the Politics of Education is just Beginning' in Jay D. Scribner (ed.), The Politics of Education, pp. 319-34.

48. Hawley, p.325.

studies, and between studies at the macro and micro levels.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES

In order to help promote discussion about research priorities, I offer the following suggestions concerning types of work which I consider should have a high priority in the future. This, of course, is a personal view, and undoubtedly other scholars may think priority should be given to different areas or types of work.

1. Studies with a high emphasis on theory and theory building. Here I have in mind a number of different kinds of work including explorations of the overall connections between politics and education, studies of the concepts and frameworks now available in political science and related fields and assessment of their possible utility for work in the politics of education, efforts to make explicit the frameworks and assumptions researchers have in their minds as they proceed with their work, and attempts at developing new frameworks and new theoretical constructs to tackle specific problems in the politics of education. The latter may be essential if we are to effectively explore the linkages between how political actors (both public officials and agencies, and citizens) behave and the factors shaping such behaviour, and the consequences of this in the delivery of education services.

2. Comparative studies. Here I have in mind not only cross-national studies and studies of actors, processes and behaviour in different jurisdictions, but also studies which compare aspects of the education policy system with other areas of government activity. Peterson[49] and Zeigler have both advocated studies of the latter kind, and Zeigler has gone on to explore aspects of the similarities and differences between local school government and urban government. Comparative studies have many values, but in particular they often suggest new questions to ask and save the researchers from developing explanations based on the notion that arrangements or patterns in a particular institution, nation or policy area of government are atypical.

3. Summary or interpretative studies. Over the past decade, as we have noted, a great deal of research has been completed. But to date we have seen comparatively few attempts to pull together the main findings, to interpret the results, and to point to their implications for practice and

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49. For example, Peterson, 'The Politics of American Education', p.380.

further research. Here I have in mind studies addressed primarily for scholars, as well as those aiming to convey the findings of research to practitioners.

4. Studies with a focus primarily on the macro level. Case-studies undoubtedly have great value. But on the other hand, there is a need to know to what extent particular cases are typical of some large entity. In the United States, with fifty separate state jurisdictions, and thousands of separate school boards, this is a particularly pressing problem. One approach is to employ survey research based on the use of national samples. Another is to launch national studies, whereby teams of individual researchers explore the same problem in particular institutions or jurisdictions using a common research design. Some years ago now Joel Berke and Michael Kirst[50] did something along these lines to study what happened to federal funds when they came down the pipeline of half a dozen or more separate American states in the late 1950s and mid-1960s.

5. Studies of central government and education. Here I have in mind studies concentrating on national and/or state levels. As we have noted earlier, this area has been neglected. In Australia, for example, although state governments have the primary constitutional responsibility for all public education, except in Federal territories, we still have no detailed studies of the structure of state education departments, or of the main characteristics of the education policy process at state level. Similarly we still know comparatively little of many aspects of policy-making at Federal level and how Federal policies actually affect education policy and education services at state level.

6. Studies of the 'so what' questions of policy. Here I have in mind work along the lines advocated by Hawley, plus other studies attempting to use the concepts and methodologies of political science to tackle significant current problems in education. It will be recalled that earlier in the paper it was argued that the students of the politics of education have failed, to a substantial degree, to convince other scholars in education and practitioners of the utility of much of their research efforts, and that in part this stems from a failure to tackle problems of practical significance. Hawley's argument is similar; unless policy studies link formulation and

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50. Michael Kirst and Joel Berke (eds.), Federal Aid to Education, Heath, Lexington, 1973.

and output processes with implementation and impacts their practical value, as well as their contribution to theory, will be severely limited. Hawley provides some interesting illustrations of projects that could be attempted in the U.S. For instance,[51] he refers to the very large body of literature on local school governance, and points out that almost none of these studies deal with the impact of different institutions and actors of the quality of life in public schools. He asks: How do variations in electoral conflict affect the adaptiveness of schools to student needs? Does community control or greater parental involvement affect the values children hold or their attitude toward school and achievement? Are school systems where policy formulation is dominated by the superintendent any more effective than those in which major initiatives come from elected officials? In brief, we need not only to look for differences between institutions and behaviour patterns, but to ask what difference do the various observed differences make and pursue our analysis down to the level where it effects the quality and type of education services provided, and the lives of students and members of the wider community.

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51. Hawley, p.327.